

from Miguel Ryan

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back
- Aug 15th
1985

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Here are my notes, not clean typed, as discussed.

Sp

First, I thoroughly enjoyed the story. I hope enough of your readers will do so too, so as to help change the climate of indifference and ignorance towards Afghanistan. Most of your account rings with authenticity. Some bits need tidying up, I think: I have tried to mark them from the text.
General points:

- ✗ You translate Panjsher as Five Tigers, though you acknowledge it is literally five lions. (Both tigers and lions are now extinct in Afghanistan.) Farsi scholars may take issue here...
- ✗ You refer throughout to the language as Dari. There is no clear right and wrong to my knowledge, but usually I think Afghans say they speak farsi rather than dari (although it is a derivative of the Persian farsi). I asked a Tajik (therefore farsi speaker) and he confirmed this. Dari isn't wrong, just a little stilted perhaps? Again Pushtun is usually referred to as the language spoken by Pathans (rather than Pushtuns speaking Pushtu or Pushtun). Again this I think is more a matter of common practice than of right and wrong.
- ✓ Other recurring points: Afghans are even more prudish than you allow: You would never have males and females sleeping on the same roof together, or ~~same~~ ^{same} room (unless it was just husband and wife). If they had guests all the men would sleep in one place, all the women and small children in another. No reason why a married couple shouldn't be together, but not with any one else. I doubt very much the
- ✗ reality of Jane kissing Mohammed even with the caveats you make. He'd think it an open invitation. (I think you should check that elsewhere).
- ✗ Another general point on conditions at the time you write of: I think there was more hunger (especially among visitors) than you suggest (notably where you list hardships, and don't mention hunger.) I don't think it needs a heavy emphasis but a couple of references: malnutrition among babies accounts for much of the high mortality rate. Afghans can digest rice in quantities: most Europeans got very hungry when we were there: yoghurt (extremely good) was a luxury.

Page reference

✓ 38
✓ 53

-Cation. Misprint I think.

No camels in the Panjsher. The only camels we saw were with nomads and a few pulling logs near Teremengal. Nor are there mules or ponies. Only horses and donkeys. Donkeys would do here perfectly.

? 56

61

Frankly not sure if women in Panjsher ever wear turbans: usually they are veiled and out of sight. ~~Ma~~ Poetic licence?

Oddly Afghans seem to digest pain in a different way from Europeans. Many times doctors with us said they were astoundingly stoical--or ~~more~~ in shock. Somehow this child's reaction seems European to me. I think a horrifying dead ~~silence~~ silence after perhaps an initial shout is more convincing.

ex99

Six million Pathans (Pushtuns). see above
Panisher I take it is a misprint for Panjsher.

101

end para one. anti-aircraft guns and ^{hand held} ground to air

page

✓ 72 (out of sequence) "filtered boiled and purified water". a quibble: it would probably not be filtered, boiled and purified. it would either be boiled or else she would put a purifying tablet in and leave it fifteen minutes (tastes filthy). Either way is okay.

✓ 98/103 There's a repetition of "I told Bill in Paris....."

~~think carpet bombing is done from great heights I don't think
I can imagine it~~

✓ 164 Buzkhi with live Russian. I take it this is calculated poetic licence: the sort of thing Massud would forbid, in reality. Still its strong stuff!

~~personally, I think it's probably~~

✗ 155 I suggest adding 'hunger' to list of woes in para 5.

✓ 159 para 5. 'knee length leather boots' taken from Russian. Actually they are calf length and black leather. All ^{guerrilla} 'officers' like to wear them --Massud does.

✗ 163 The kiss. I see its literary force. But I find it hard to believe in. I think an Afghan would consider it an invitation, or else somehow insulting. Please don't take my word for it. We didn't even see many women at close range so my judgment is perhaps restricted. And you write it movingly.....

~~from~~

(eg high altitude)

✓ 111 (out of sequence.) carpet bombing./They did actually try it once. I think the mountains made it ineffectual. I don't think AA guns would really stop them. Perhaps wiser to say (line 12) 'The rebels could not even begin to resist such a tactic, for they had virtually no anti-aircraft weapons.' (that leaves you the possibility of changing the AGS-17 into a SAM 7 if the AGS-17 wouldn't work.)

✓ 114 (also out of sequence) para 6. Jean-Pierre's account of a pointless battle. Purely FYI. The Russians usually conduct a coordinated offensive with advance troops helicoptered in (actually to Khenj once when we were there) while APCs and tanks bring troops by road to meet them. This doesn't conflict but colours your account in J-P's mouth.

✓ 183 'Ismael and his wife making love a few yards away.' It would have to be another room, though there's no reason why JP shouldn't hear.

✓ 193 second half of page (in ink) 'a large farmhouse'. Quibbling, there really are no large farmhouses; just farmhouses.

✓ 196 Massud (line 8) talks of taking 'our grenade launcher....' It would be 'a' or 'one of our' grenade launchers. They have lots.

✓ 202 a really tiny point. Line 4. Very unlikely the butcher would have anything so sophisticated as a tiled slab. Almost certainly a wooden one with hooks above on which meat (goat probably) would hang; (more likely nothing.)

209 There's a further danger for Jean Pierre that seeing his foreign face Afghans on the Russian side would shoot him ~~before~~ before he had time to explain. Afghans pass easily of course. (On second thoughts I don't think see that this is important.)

page

- ✓ 213 line 13 on. In fact I'd cut the comparison of cost with a rebel territory. I forget the actual cost of Pakistani cigarettes in the Panjsher (when available) but they are surprisingly cheap, if scarce.
- ✓ 223 Para 2. three hundred mile trek. The Khyber pass is about 100 miles as the crow flies ~~is~~ from the Panjsher; call it 150 miles allowing for the zigzag route and detours.
- ✓ para 3. Jean Pierre could never carry all that. ~~Nxbhdyxnkannzarnynxn~~
True the horses go at a different pace but they all meet up at night.
He could load up from the horses a day's supply and carry that.
Naturally this, too, has problems. But he couldn't credibly carry a weeks supply of food for two ~~and~~. ~~However not too many of your readers will bother about this.~~
- ✓ 231 mid-page. ~~It~~ seems to be something missing to explain the privy appearing *here*.
- ✓ Its the Waikhan, not Wakhan corridor.
- ✓ 249/188 para 3 'It would burn underwater perfectly' is word for word repetition (of p.188).
- ✓ 251 Suggestion: insert 'at its rotor blades' after fourth word line 1 to read "...and fire down ~~any~~ at its rotor blades..."
- ✓ 256 line 1. "...pepped up his stolen ^{Russian} mines with extra TNT."
This may well be so in some cases. What was common when we were there was for Chinese mines (communist) acquired in Peshawar, and brought in with convoys, to be beefed up with the TNT from unexploded Russian bombs. The Afghans thought them too weak and became very skillful at boosting them to blow big tanks fifty yards off the Panjsher road.
- 258 ~~Hxbhfxnynxnhlxngxssedthexmssionncomandarwxzninx~~ Hind.
- ✗ 281. para two. Are there lifts in Kabul? ^{line?} I suppose in the Intercontinental there must be. (Your typist keeps spelling Parisian as Parisien)
- ✓ 323 last para. Massud would sensibly say it will take you a good two weeks. The distance is 150 miles (again adding fifty to the crow's flight for zigzag. NOT 3 weeks and 300 miles. (In fact like all Afghans Massud isn't good on distances. He ~~is~~ told us it would only take seven days. It took us 13)
- ✗ 330 line 7. IS? TAHIR is the accepted European name for this 20,000 ft peak.
- ✓ 361 line 5. I'm fairly sure there are no ponies, only horses, in Afghanistan.
- ✓ line 18. Figures having no meaning for almost all Afghans, I find it unconvincing that such accuracy should manifest itself. Much more likely that Mohamed says 1 kilometre and it turns out to be ten.
- ✓ 368 "The way becomes easier once you are out of Nuristan". Obviously, because that's Pakistan. I think this needs rewording.
- ✓ 389 "But he was Tajik." More likely he'd say "a Tajik."
- ✓ 398 bottom. A whole bottle of medicine would be a colossal present. Also it implies huge and heavy supplies.
- ✓ 399 midpage. pony again.
- ✗ 406 Rhodesian bush. Previous reference earlier is to Western desert (in or some such). Here it is 'those journeys' as if you've referred to them before. Would African bush be safer? (Outside my remit I know, but sometimes a fresh eye spots things. If not please ignore.)

(PS) We discussed the AGS-17. It's not the chemically best for its mission & defence